

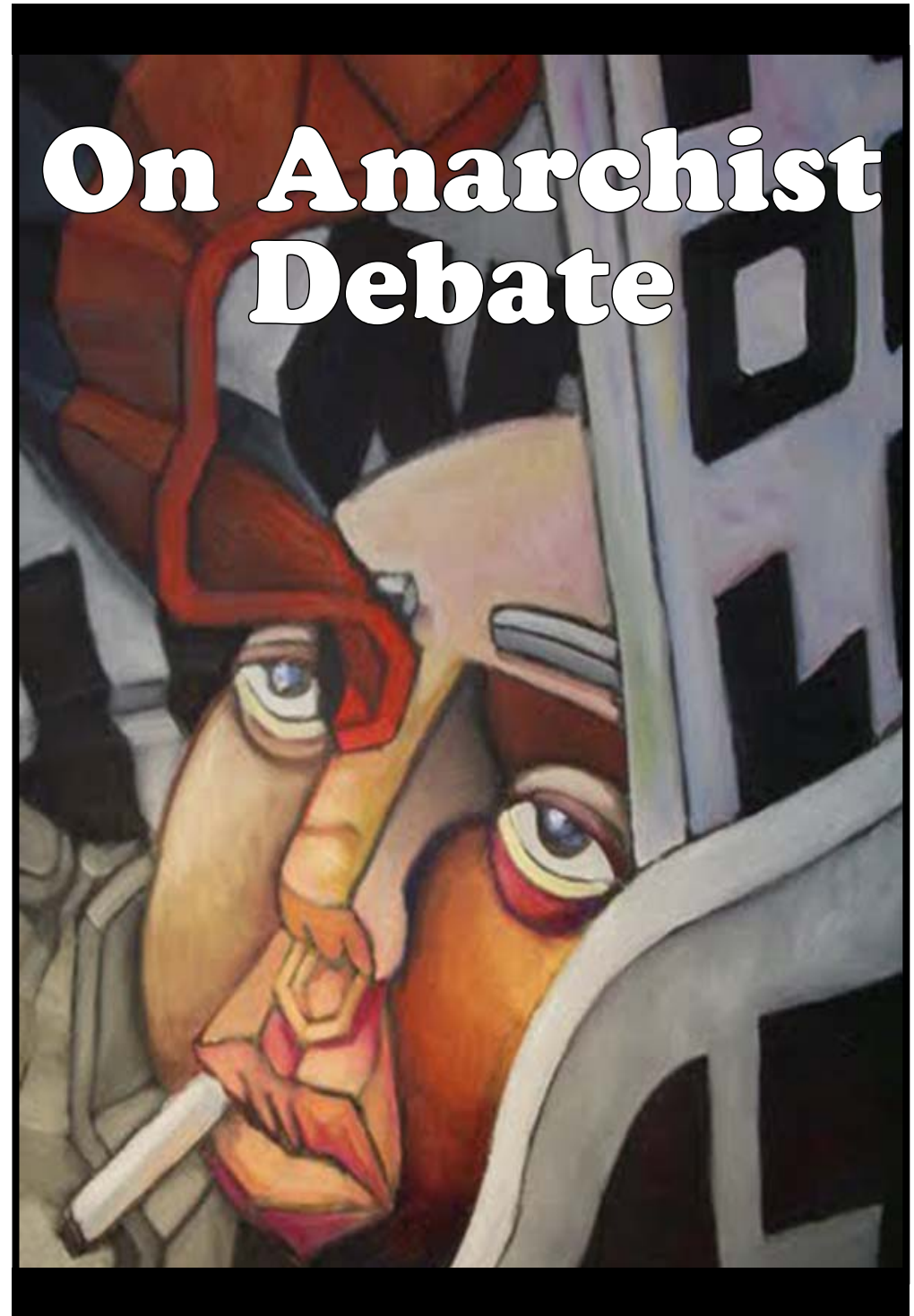
in both "traditions" that it is simply stupid to dismiss. Anarchism will only improve through serious debate, not useless sectarian labelling. A writer like Bonanno is as important as any platformist writers, maybe even someone like Makhno.

The point is, sectarian attitudes are a hamper to serious debate. By extension, sectarianism is an obstacle to serious improvement of anarchist theory and practice. At a moment, as now, when anarchism is a bubbling influence on social upheavals, it is more important than ever for us to be critical. But it is also more important than ever for us to debate construc-

tively if anarchism is to be a serious influence. Too much criticism directed inward is self-destructive and alienating. Comradely criticism, pointed at real failings, is necessary for moving "forward" - even if it is harsh criticism. Anarchist denunciations of other anarchists, without constructive content, only destroys what little "movement" there is. The most important thing now is to *improve* anarchism through debate and action.

[www.anarkismo.net/article/11811](http://www.anarkismo.net/article/11811)

# On Anarchist Debate





**The prevalence of (ultra-)sectarian and petty-argumentative attitudes, leading to a lack of constructive debate, is doing irreversible damage to the anarchist movement. A basic problem here is the extreme difficulty of consolidating fragments of serious anarchist thought and activity, in a context permeated and distorted by bourgeois ideology...**

Anarchism is a simmering influence in social struggles, which in recent times has put itself back "on the map" as a serious international movement with the upheaval in Greece and, to a lesser extent, the protests at the Republican National Convention (although the latter mostly led to negative perceptions from the U.S. public - nonetheless it made some impression and provoked a "surge" in organising). Unfortunately, the incoherence and disorganisation of so much of the anarchist "scene," internationally and in the United States, remains a massive obstruction to serious activity. Some significant steps are being made toward a more coherent movement, emphasizing popular struggles and involvement at a mass level. However, the prevalence of (ultra-)sectarian and petty-argumentative attitudes, leading to a lack of constructive debate, is doing irreversible damage to the anarchist movement. A basic problem here is the extreme difficulty of consolidating fragments of serious anarchist thought and activity, in a context permeated and distorted by bourgeois ideology.

This is not a simple issue of a few "personalities" derailing all the other anarchists' efforts through confusion.

It affects every level of anarchist discourse in ways that are not reducible to a small "chaotic element" (although such an element undoubtedly plays a big part). A common perception from outside the "scene" is that confusion and sectarianism come naturally to anarchists because anarchism itself is ideologically confused and sectarian. Of course, ironically more than a few of those making such an argument (e.g. Marxists, Trotskyists, etc. ...) are themselves ultra-sectarian, and talk of "unification" from them usually means *subordination*.

The deep and complex problems confronting anarchism cannot be understood from outside - they can only be understood and confronted from a real anarchist perspective. While we should not discard valuable contributions from any direction, it should never be forgotten that we are *anarchists* and that should never be subordinated or made secondary to more "pragmatic" considerations as long as means of resistance remain at our disposal.

It is important to make a distinction between *theoretical* and *practical* disagreements. But again, that is no simple issue as practical differences are nearly

always framed in theoretical terms, often obscuring concrete similarities or exaggerating differences unnecessarily. This is also not helped by considerable theoretical differences *within* this or that tendency, to the extent that debating with one person might lead to entirely different perceptions than it would with another from the same "camp." The lack of programmatic thinking together with the scattered, isolated situation of so many anarchists is primarily responsible for such confusion, although there are other factors common to all groupings (individual "spinning" of ideas, theoretical nuances, etc. etc.). A more long-term issue is simply the volume and variety of writings all identified as anarchist, frequently conflicting with each other in their content.

Of course, individuals must pick and choose valuable ideas while leaving out worthless ones. However, that does not negate the central importance of ongoing debate to sharpen or improve on ideas. The key point in all of this is *criticality*, as in the individual's ability to self-criticise and to criticise others at a practical and theoretical level through study, debate, action and reflection. But criticism in that sense should be serious and thoughtful. Controversy has its value in stirring up debate and pointing out problems, but then debate should be constructive and not petty if anything is to be gained from it. Not to say criticism should be "softened" one bit to avoid "offending" its recipient, but even harsh criticism can be constructive if it is serious and pointed at real problems and not simply for sectarian or petty-personal reasons.

Consider one example that stands

out. There is an ongoing argument between "insurrectionary" anarchists and "Platform" organisational anarchists. Both are part of revolutionary social and class-struggle anarchism, although there are some "post-leftist" insurrectional groupings that tend to denounce class struggle or communist anarchists as disguised or "recovering" Marxists. Being personally heavily influenced by elements of both insurrectional and "Platform" thinking, it is an interesting but frustrating debate, not least because it nearly always bogs down into sectarian name-calling and personal "digs" missing the real point.

For insurrectionists, there is a problem with "neo-Platformists" attempting to "Bolshevise" anarchism, identifying it with Leninism. Between accusatory labels, there are serious criticisms of bureaucratisation and a sort of "wait for the masses" mentality that runs through "Platform" thinking, which can sometimes interfere with action. In contrast, platformists point to anarchist isolation due to incoherence and disorganisation, arguing for a common line of action and theory to have a consistent presence in struggles. That is usually accompanied by talk about a "chaotic element" responsible for anarchists' disorganisation, many times pointing at insurrectional-types as a primary culprit.

Some of these are serious points that need debating. Unfortunately, serious debate is obstructed by writing-off a huge fraction of revolutionary anarchists through labelling as "neo-Platform Leninists" or simplistically faulting insurrectionalism for alienating anarchism. There is a lot of value